



# New Hampshire

## Building Teams to Combat Sick Building Syndrome

### Public Health Problem

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that people in industrialized countries spend more than 90% of their time indoors. For infants, older adults, people with chronic diseases, and most urban residents of any age, the proportion of time spent indoors is estimated to be higher. The term “Sick Building Syndrome” (SBS) describes a situation in which reported symptoms among a population of building occupants can be associated with their presence in that building. Typical complaints include eye, nose, or throat irritation; nasal congestion; inability to concentrate; and general malaise. New Hampshire was ranked second in the nation for inadequate ventilation within public buildings and school facilities.

### Program Example

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services used Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant funds to develop a partnership with the EPA regional office in Boston to implement the indoor air quality Tools for Schools (TfS) program. The funds also helped establish a statewide health consultation program for Sick Building Syndrome that deals with the interrelated problems of poor facility conditions and sensitive school populations such as children with asthma, allergies, and disabilities. This team-based approach to solving indoor air quality problems provides the investigative tools for identifying indoor pollutants, evaluating building conditions, and managing sensitive populations. At the conclusion of the program, the TfS team is prepared to implement short-term environmental and behavioral solutions and plan for long-term capital improvement to affected facilities as needed. PHHS Block Grant funds ensured that the New Hampshire Indoor Air Quality Program was able to fulfill the core public health functions of surveillance for sick buildings and people, implement realistic interventions to assist the occupants, and assess the impact of TfS through tracking of school health data and facility conditions.

### Implications

The goal of the New Hampshire Indoor Air Quality Program is to facilitate long-term institutional change by creating permanent, facility-based teams to monitor building ecosystems and the health of the building inhabitants. Over the course of 2001, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services advised staff at 23 public buildings and 46 school facilities through phone consultations or site visits. As part of this process, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services provided 6 Tools for Schools training sessions and distributed 22 TfS guidance kits to educational facilities.